

# *Code Blue Handbook*

**2005 - 2006 Edition**



Revised February 14, 2006

# Introduction

***Welcome to the Code Blue team!***

*The Code Blue shelter is unique among Baltimore City shelters in that it operates only during periods of extreme winter weather conditions and is structured on a public health model. As such, we place critical importance on the availability of basic health services, mental health and substance abuse counseling and referrals on-site. In addition, we have adopted a harm reduction approach, with an emphasis on creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect among clients and staff. Staff who worked in the Code Blue shelter during its first year already know the personal satisfaction that can come from working with and for people experiencing homelessness. May you all find the Code Blue shelter to be a challenging and rewarding work environment.*

## **History**

In its first incarnation (2002-2003), *Code Blue* was a landmark collaboration between the Baltimore City Health Department and the Department of Housing and Community Development's Office of Homeless Services to provide emergency services in a low-barrier setting to a homeless population not served through the traditional shelter system. Now in its fourth year, *Code Blue* is coordinated by Baltimore Homeless Services, Inc. formerly the Office of Homeless Services, a new non-profit created under the leadership of the Health Department to improve collaboration among public and private agencies, promote innovative programs, and streamline administrative and grant-related activities. *Code Blue* continues to be a bold experiment which is constantly growing and improving with the partnership of additional Baltimore City agencies and service organizations.

## **Mission**

To provide emergency health services, food and shelter to reduce death and cold weather-related injury among people experiencing homelessness on the coldest winter nights.

## **About This Handbook**

This Handbook is a general summary of the work rules and policies of the *Code Blue* shelter. The standards of conduct included herein are basic guidelines developed to maintain minimum operations and efficiency. We trust and expect staff to let common sense guide them through situations not detailed in this Handbook. This Handbook replaces and supersedes any prior handbook.

Thank you for participating in the *Code Blue* program.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Gillis, MS, RN  
President and CEO  
Baltimore Homeless Services, Inc.

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# **Code Blue Handbook**

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## **Policies**

### **Animals in the Building Policy:**

To protect the health and safety of clients, staff and visitors, animals are not permitted in the *Code Blue* shelter. This regulation includes domesticated and non-domesticated animals. Exceptions to this regulation may be made at the discretion of the shelter manager, as in the case of:

- a. Seeing Eye Dogs
- b. Hearing Assisting Dogs
- c. Mentally ill clients who would not otherwise receive treatment without their animal present.

In the event that an animal is granted access to the shelter, the security staff must be notified.

### **Confidentiality Policy:**

The *Code Blue* shelter is committed to maintaining confidentiality of client information and complying with all state, federal and ethical requirements regarding confidentiality of clients' medical information. Staff and volunteers are expected to treat ALL recorded data or oral information as confidential. Staff and volunteers are not to discuss or exchange information about clients except when necessary to furnish or arrange services.

Exceptions to this policy include, 1) when information about child abuse or neglect is shared, no matter when the abuse occurred, providers are required by law to make a report to child protective services or 2) if clients express intent to hurt themselves or others.

### **Drug Free Workplace Policy:**

In accordance with the Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988, the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of controlled substances by staff members, volunteers or clients is strictly prohibited, as is the possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages during shelter hours. Similarly, if consumption of over the counter or prescription medication has impaired a staff member's ability to effectively and safely perform the functions of their job, he/she should report to the shelter manager and find a shift replacement.

### **Media Relations Policy:**

*Code Blue* staff may not speak to news media as an official or unofficial spokesperson without prior clearance from the President of Baltimore Homeless Services or the Health, Housing or Police Commissioners. All inquiries from the media should be referred to the appropriate media liaison or agency contact.

### **Professional Behavior Policy:**

Staff and volunteers are responsible for setting clear and appropriate boundaries with clients. Staff and volunteers shall be committed to the client's welfare and best interests and avoid any situation in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Each staff member must assume a professional demeanor, treating all clients equally and fairly and when necessary, explaining the boundaries of your relationship in a calm and supportive manner.

**Women and Children Policy:**

Women and children are housed in separate rooms from men. Families are assigned beds in rooms specifically designated for families. Single women are assigned beds in rooms specifically designated for single women. To enable closer oversight by staff, rooms for women and children and for single women are located closest to the registration desk. Children are to be supervised at all times. Problems or concerns about the well-being of women or children should be reported immediately to Jeanne Morris, BHS Coordinator 443 829-8583 (cell) or 410 396-4885 (work) or to Laura Gillis, BHS President and CEO, at 410 545-3409 or 443 865-1824 (cell).

**Sexual Harassment Policy:**

All staff, volunteers and clients should be able to enjoy an environment free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment. No female or male should be subjected to harassment or intimidation, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexual demands or other unwelcome verbal, physical or visual conduct.

**Smoking Policy:**

The Code Blue shelter is a non-smoking environment. Smoking is only permitted in the designated outdoor smoking area during official “smoke breaks” (intervals to be determined by the Shelter Manager). Clients will not be permitted back into the shelter if they leave the designated smoking area during the smoke break.

**Exit Policy**

Clients who choose to leave the shelter at any time during the night will not be readmitted. Once intake is complete, clients are expected to remain inside the shelter at all times, with the exception of official “smoke breaks.”

**Client’s Rights and Responsibilities:**

The following rights and responsibilities will be posted in at least two locations in the *Code Blue* shelter.

- *“You have the right to a peaceful night’s sleep – therefore, we ask you to keep your voice low while in the sleeping areas.*
- *You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and the responsibility to give Code Blue shelter staff the same.*
- *You have the right to expect that conversations with staff regarding medical, addiction and mental health services are confidential.*
- *You have the responsibility to report incidents of suspected physical abuse, theft or drug use to the shelter manager.*

**Shelter Rules:**

- *The Code Blue shelter is a smoke-free environment – no smoking is allowed in the facility at any time.*
- *The City is not responsible for the loss of personal property; keep all your valuables with you or within sight.*
- *Weapons and sharp objects will be confiscated, including knives, razors, scissors and needles.*
- *Alcohol and illegal drugs are prohibited on the premises.*
- *Client radios and cell phones must be turned off (or set to vibrate) at all times.*

- *One person per cot at all times – no exceptions.*
- *Children must be with their parent(s) and supervised at all times.*
- *We reserve the right to expel any individual who refuses to comply with the rules or causes a disturbance.”*

**Expulsion Policy:** The Shelter Manager will be the final arbiter of the application of Shelter Rules and the final arbiter of the expulsion of any clients. If a client is asked to leave the facility, the Shelter Manager in consultation with the staff will designate where the client will spend the remainder of the night. Clients who are asked to leave one night may return the next night for shelter and services.

## **Operations**

### **Activation:**

*Code Blue* will be activated at the Health Commissioner’s direction using the following guidelines:

- Temperatures expected to be below 32 degrees Fahrenheit and/or extenuating circumstances (which include strong winds, wet precipitation, extended period of cold, sudden cold after warm period) deemed by the Health Commissioner to be severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of people experiencing homelessness.

The Shelter Manager has the overall responsibility for the management of the shelter, services and staff when the shelter is open.

### **Incident/Accident Reporting**

The Shelter Manager and security staff has the authority to intervene in situations posing an immediate threat to life, health or threat of damage to equipment or the facility. The staff member nearest the event shall complete the Incident/Accident Report Form immediately following the unusual occurrence. The Shelter Manager or Director of Field Health Services will then conduct an investigation of the incident. After completing the investigation, a report will be submitted to the Health Commissioner.

An “incident or accident” includes, but is not limited to:

- Observed and unobserved falls
- Lost/damaged property
- Client or staff injuries (abrasions, cuts, bruises)
- Behavioral outbursts or altercations requiring staff intervention
- Sharps injuries to clients or staff.

### **Intake Procedure:**

Intake staff will collect basic identifying information from the client, before assigning a bed number for the night. Each client will be offered the option of receiving care from the Field Health Services nurse, substance abuse and mental health counselors. The client will be given a numbered card of the appropriate color (blue = medical, green = mental health, yellow = addictions) that indicates the order in which they will be served. Clients may also access the substance abuse and mental health counselors at their leisure until 10:00 pm, if the counselor is free.

**General Care of Facility:**

- 1) Furniture may not be moved from one room to another.
- 2) The television station and volume level are to be determined by the Shelter Manager/Designee.
- 3) No personal possessions should be left in the common areas.

**Laundry:**

Only the Shelter Manager may approve use of the washer and dryer, which is intended for treatment of communicable diseases, such as lice or scabies or for clients who have seriously soiled their clothes.

**Lockers:**

Designated lockers and locks may be used for *Code Blue* storage only. Lockers are not for personal use by staff or shelter clients.

**Meal and Rest Periods:**

Staff working a full shift (eight hours) may take a thirty (30) minute meal break and two (2) fifteen (15) minute rest periods, as approved by the Shelter Manager regarding time and location. If staff works less than a full shift, meal and rest period may be adjusted or eliminated at the discretion of the Shelter Manager based on the number of hours worked.

**Security:**

To ensure that contraband, drugs, weapons and other unauthorized or illegal substances/materials do not enter the premises, and to ensure that tools, files, equipment, products, materials, substances and other property of the *Code Blue* shelter are not removed without proper authorization, the *Code Blue* staff reserve the right, to question, inspect, and search any employee or other person before they enter or leave the facility. All handbags, parcels and personal belongings of clients or staff members are subject to inspection and search by the staff at any time.

**Shower Usage:**

The shower is intended for clients requiring treatment for communicable diseases, such as lice or scabies, or who have seriously soiled their clothes. Only the Shelter Manager may approve use of the shower. Clients must be able to shower independently and not be at high risk for potential injury as the result of severe physical weakness or intoxication. The Shelter Manager is responsible for assessing the client's functional ability to use the shower independently. A staff member must be available to answer any questions or assist the client if necessary. The staff member is also responsible for supplying personal hygiene items, towel, and clean clothes (if available). Once the client has completed the shower, the staff member is responsible for removing any debris and cleaning the shower area of any discarded clothes or towels. Since displaced water from the shower is a hazard to other clients, the staff member is responsible for mopping up any residual standing water.

**Work Hours:**

When the Health Commissioner activates *Code Blue*, the shelter will open from 5:00 PM to 8:00 AM, except during periods of extreme weather conditions when travel from the shelter is particularly hazardous or if deemed appropriate by the Health Commissioner, in which case the shelter may remain open 24 hours per day.

## **Services**

### **Addiction Services:**

An addictions counselor will gather initial screening information to ensure access to an appropriate level of addiction services. Clients assessed as needing addiction treatment will be referred to BSAS the following morning or to an appropriate treatment program.

### **Food Services:**

A warm evening meal will be served between the hours of 5:00 pm and 9:00 pm, coordinated through The Baltimore Station, Inc. After the kitchen has closed (9:00 pm), snacks and warm drinks (i.e. coffee, etc.) will be available to clients throughout the night with the assistance of shelter staff. A light morning meal will be served between the hours of 6:00 am and 8:00 am by the nursing team. Clients are not allowed in the kitchen area. Food and beverages may only be consumed in designated eating areas.

### **Mental Health Services:**

A mental health volunteer, coordinated through Baltimore Mental Health Systems, will provide counseling and referral services to clients upon request. Clients assessed as needing a more intensive level of care, or who pose a danger to themselves or others, will be referred to Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc (BCRI) immediately or the next morning, as appropriate.

## **Emergency Management**

### **Emergency Petition:**

If the mental health volunteer determines that a client is in need of an emergency psychiatric evaluation or a danger to themselves or others, staff will notify the Shelter Manager and the security staff. The Shelter Manager will contact the Eastern District Commander to transport the client to the nearest emergency room or 911 if necessary.

### **Biological Waste Disposal:**

Biological wastes are body fluids, (urine, stool, vomit, mucus, etc.) capable of releasing potentially infectious agents when handled. Containment and disinfection after a biological spill are necessary to provide a clean and safe environment for clients, visitors and staff. Gloves must be worn when containing a biological spill. Use other personal protective equipment (e.g. eyeglasses, face protector, gown), as necessary.